

Food Safety for Farmers' Market Vendors

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Direct marketing of raw agriculture foods and processed value-added foods at farmer's markets is an important source of revenue for Maryland farmers. Since 1980, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) through Interpretive Memoranda has allowed farmers and others to make and sell homemade non-potentially hazardous baked goods and high-acid fruit jams and jellies without a health license when the processed foods are offered only at a farmer's market. More information on these accepted foods is available in Food Information Note 5 that appears on this web site. For all other foods and most sales venues, a person must receive a food processing and or retail food service license in order to manufacture or sell food to the public. In general, the Department's Office of Food Protection and Consumer Health Services (OFPCS) licenses food processors and the local health departments (LHD) license retail food sales.

Foods sold at farmers' markets must be wholesome, safe, and from approved sources. Government agencies, vendors, market managers, and market sponsors all responsible for the safety of the products at the markets. Providing safe and properly labeled foods not only protects public health but ensures consumer confidence. Market managers can screen potential vendors and foods and reject those that do not meet applicable DHMH, LHD, United States Department of Agriculture, and Maryland Department of Agriculture requirements. Farmers and vendors may find the following tips helpful in promoting food safety.

Harvesting and Handling Produce

Treat produce as if you were going to prepare it for yourself.

Before harvesting and selling produce, wash hands with hot soapy water and again after using the toilet or any other activity likely to dirty hands.

Scrub and wash produce that has contacted soil to remove dirt. Use potable water.

Clean and sanitize equipment and surfaces that are used to handle produce. This includes harvest containers, cutting utensils used at harvest and selling, the handling area where washing, grading, sorting and packing occurs.

Food Preparation

Wash hands often when handling food.

Do not allow persons with sores or who are ill to handle food.

Use clean dishes and utensils for food preparation.

Clean and sanitize work surfaces with which food may come in contact.

Shorten time between preparation and the sale of the item by preparing small batches.
Store food in new food grade containers or packaging materials not in garbage bags.

Store food at the proper temperature. Maintain your refrigerator at 45°F or below.

Refrigerate produce after cutting or slicing

Sale of Food

Keep sale areas clean and clean and sanitize surfaces.

Keep garbage containers covered and avoid accumulation of waste and debris.

Use utensils to handle food. If plastic gloves are used to handle food, wash hands first and remove them to handle money and other non-food items.

Keep raw foods separated from prepared foods.

Protect foods from dust, sneezing, and handling by customers by using appropriate packaging or covers.

Keep potentially hazardous and perishable foods at safe temperatures.

Label all food in packaged form with common name of food, ingredients, net weight, name and address of manufacturer or distributor and any other required information.

Monitor all foods to prevent food tampering.

Customers have the right to expect that the food you offer for sale is safe and wholesome.

